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Memorandum

*Prospects for Further Proliferation
of Nuclear Weapons*

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

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1 September 1974

Copy NO 107

NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION



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Prospects for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

1. In the 1980s, the production of nuclear weapons will be within the technological and economic capabilities of many countries. The once formidable barriers to development of nuclear weapons by nations of middling size and resources have steadily diminished over time. They will continue to shrink in the years ahead as plutonium, enriched uranium, and technology become more widely spread. Some countries will consider nuclear weapons largely in terms of military utility. The principal determinant of the extent of nuclear weapons proliferation in coming years will, however, be political considerations—including the policies of the superpowers with regard to proliferation, the policies of suppliers of nuclear materials and technology, and regional ambitions and tensions.

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12. It is theoretically possible for a country capable of developing a nuclear weapon to do so covertly, up to the test of a first device. And a test is not absolutely necessary. In practice, indications of such a program are virtually certain to reach the outside world. But most countries will seek to maintain the tightest possible security with regard to any military nuclear activities, and information is likely to be intermittent and inconclusive. Indigenous ballistic missile delivery systems, on the other hand, would be readily identifiable early in the development cycle, and missile systems obtained abroad would not remain undetected for any significant period.

13. Governments backward in the nuclear field and anxious to acquire a token capability quickly are more likely to try to steal weapons than fissionable materials, despite the fact that the latter are less well protected. A country capable of developing and producing its own nuclear device is highly unlikely to try to steal weapons, but one might seek fissionable materials by theft or diversion. Competently done, diversion might go undetected.

14. Terrorists might attempt theft of either weapons or fissionable materials. They could see the latter as useful for terror or blackmail purposes even if they had no intention of going on to fabricate weapons.

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~~Sensitive Intelligence Sources and Methods Involved~~